

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4326

Medical Focus - Avian Flu Essentials

March 28, 2006

"We have seen, in the past several weeks, a remarkable acceleration of the pandemic in birds."

– Dr. Rajiv Venkayya, Special Assistant for biodefense to President Bush

Dear Colleague:

Last session, I sent out a series of letters to address an emerging global health threat – Avian Flu. They can be found on my website in the *Legislative Issues* section on *Avian Flu*, under *Related Files* (<http://burgess.house.gov/Issues/Issue/?IssueID=2095>). Over the last few months, this disease has continued to spread westward from Asia and the number of outbreaks has acutely increased in frequency. This disease is already endemic in birds. Fortunately, no effective human-to-human transmission has been achieved to date. This correlates to a Pandemic Alert Phase 3 out of 6, according to the World Health Organization classification system. I have included a description of the 6 different phases on the reverse of this letter.

As of March 13, HHS has worked with governors and state health departments to conduct and complete 23 state summits. Within the next few months, the remaining states will organize their summits to focus on pandemic preparedness as well.

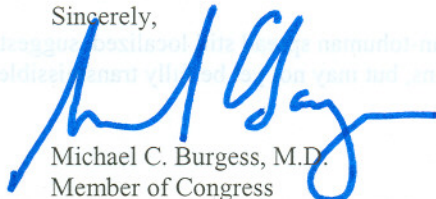
To highlight the spread of avian influenza, here is an outline of animal and human outbreaks since the beginning of the year 2006:

January 30	Iraq	February 18	India	March 5	Poland
February 8	Nigeria	February 19	France	March 7	Albania
February 9	Azerbaijan	February 21	Hungary and	March 13	Cameroon
February 11	Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy		Malaysia	March 14	Myanmar
February 12	Slovenia	February 25	Slovakia and	March 16	Denmark
February 13	Russia		Bosnia-Herzegovina	March 17	Afghanistan
February 14	Iran, Austria, and Germany	February 27	Georgia and Niger	March 20	Israel
February 17	Egypt	February 28	Sweden	March 21	Pakistan
		March 1	Switzerland	March 24	Jordan
		March 2	Serbia-Montenegro		

For more detail, go to http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/timeline.pdf

This extensive list illustrates the virulence of H5N1. Further efforts are needed to contain this disease in birds and to ensure our country's preparedness. In the upcoming series of letters, I plan on addressing more scientific facts about this disease, comparing avian flu to SARS, describing in more detail how antiviral drugs function, and highlighting how we can better deal with this health threat.

Sincerely,


Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress

Human Death Toll From Bird Flu at 103

Washington Post, March 21, 2006

GENEVA -- The human death toll from the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu reached 103 after five people died from the disease in Azerbaijan, the World Health Organization said Tuesday. WHO said seven of 11 patients from Azerbaijan had tested positive for H5N1 in samples checked at a major laboratory in Britain. Five of those cases were fatal.

The sources of infection were still under investigation, but officials suspected a connection to the feathers of dead swans.

"The majority of cases have occurred in females between the ages of 15 and 20 years," WHO said. "In this community, the defeathering of birds is a task usually undertaken by adolescent girls and young women."

So far, there was no indication of direct exposure to dead or diseased poultry in some of the cases. That has been the usual source of exposure for humans who caught bird flu. Health officials fear the virus could mutate into a version that could easily be transmitted between people, potentially triggering a global pandemic.

China agreed to give WHO samples from infected animals following complaints that Beijing was hampering vaccine research by withholding such samples, Dr. Julie Hall, an official of the WHO office in Beijing, said Wednesday. Chinese officials have been accused of withholding samples to boost the status of China's own scientists and possibly increase chances that they might develop a potentially lucrative vaccine.

Meanwhile, tests confirmed that the H5N1 strain has spread to Pakistan, the government said. The Agriculture Ministry said British lab tests were conducted on chickens from two farms in northwestern Pakistan. The deadly virus was detected in each, supporting Pakistani lab tests, the ministry said.

The H5N1 virus has killed or forced the slaughter of tens of millions of chickens and ducks across Asia since 2003. It has spread more recently with migrating birds to Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

WHO Pandemic Phases

INTERPANDEMIC PERIOD

Phase 1. No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low.

Phase 2. No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease.

PANDEMIC ALERT PERIOD

Phase 3. Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no human-to-human spread, or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact.

Phase 4. Small cluster(s) with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localized, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans.

Phase 5. Larger cluster(s) but human-to-human spread still localized, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible (substantial pandemic risk).

PANDEMIC PERIOD

Phase 6. Pandemic: increased and sustained transmission in the general population.